

Do we want to ‘Make it Happen’?

Residents' perception of Rotterdam's place brand and its impact on their willingness to engage in the city.

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Abstract

This study is focused on residents' perceptions of the Rotterdam place brand 'Rotterdam. Make it Happen', whether they identify with the brand, and if this has an impact on their propensity for civic engagement. This topic is relevant, as there is a gap in the literature on the impact of branding on the prosocial behaviour of residents. Eleven residents from different parts of Rotterdam have been interviewed, and a content analysis has been conducted of relevant brand materials. The findings have demonstrated a dynamic and complex relation between place brand perception, place brand identification and propensity for civic engagement. As results show, while positive place brand perception can contribute to a sense of identification, this does not always lead to civic propensity. Other factors, such as structural barriers to engagement and personal attitudes, appear to play a more significant role in shaping residents' propensity for civic engagement. The study highlights the need for more inclusive and visible brand strategies and more supportive conditions for civic engagement.

Keywords: Place Branding, Civic engagement, Place Brand Identification, Residents' perceptions and Rotterdam.

Preface

First and foremost, I would like to thank my supervisor, Dr. Alberto Gianoli, for guiding and supporting me through the thesis process. Thank you for your feedback and words of encouragement throughout this journey. I really appreciate it! Furthermore, I would like to thank all my professors at the IHS and ESSB for providing me with so much knowledge and new skills in the past year, which has truly given me the ambition, insight and confidence to pursue my next step as a future urban governance professional. Especially Dr. Laura Ripoll González for introducing me to the fascinating world of place branding and inspiring me to choose this topic for my thesis.

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List of Abbreviations

RMIH	Rotterdam. Make it Happen
TPB	Theory of Planned Behaviour

1. Introduction

As cities are dealing with more complex problems, such as health crises, climate crises, and rising inequality, governments are beginning to understand that these problems cannot be solved solely by themselves (Visser et al., 2024). Various studies have demonstrated that the support and active participation of the residents are vital for the development of policies that are more long-lasting, suitable, effective and that offer greater public value (Bovaird & Loeffler, 2012; Edelenbos & Van Meerkerk, 2016; Skarmetas et al., 2020). Consequently, cities are looking for ways to civically engage residents who are willing to contribute to their city. Residents' willingness to engage can be explained by their propensity for civic engagement, which is defined as the likelihood of an individual to engage civically, based on their commitment and capacity (Kim et al., 2024). This can be influenced by their attitudes towards civic engagement, social norms and perceived behavioural control (Kerby, 2024; Pavlova et al., 2022).

Place branding might offer a solution for this. Place branding is defined as a means of adding meaning to a certain geographical location, such as a region or city, by using symbolic constructs that trigger positive associations towards that area, often distinguishing it from other places (Eshuis & Klijn, 2012). The popularity of place branding has increased in recent years as a strategy for urban development, often related to economic and spatial policy goals (Eshuis et al., 2014; Braun et al., 2013). Additionally, according to Sadeque et al. (2022), place branding can also lead to residents feeling more attached to their city and stimulate residents' pride in the city and city citizenship behaviour. According to research, citizens are more eager to act according to a brand's values when they identify and align with the brand and its narratives, or when they have a say in its formulation (Sadeque et al. 2022; Taecharungroj, 2016). Sadeque et al. (2022) coined this as 'city brand love' and stated that this can lead to increased prosocial behaviours, such as civic engagement.

However, including and engaging citizens in place branding has been proven to be a difficult task (Braun et al., 2013; Eshuis & Klein, 2012; Ripoll et al., 2025). According to Eshuis and Klijn (2012), branding can sometimes simplify and paint an unrealistic image of reality, which can create a misalignment between the brand and the residents. This makes it harder for residents to identify with a brand and thus less likely for them to embody it and behave according to the brand's values (Ripoll et al., 2025; Yu & Kim, 2020).

1.1. Problem Statement and Research Objective

This study explores these theoretical and dynamic concepts in practice by focusing on the case of Rotterdam. The municipality of Rotterdam has recognised that an interactive and collaborative approach may be more fitting for addressing the city's complex and intertwined challenges (Municipality of Rotterdam, 2022). Hence, in recent years, the city has been inviting and encouraging residents to have a say in shaping and improving their city (Visser et al., 2024). However, involving these residents has proven to be difficult, as not every resident feels involved in the city.

The city of Rotterdam has been trying for the past seven years to focus more on citizenship, civic pride and local ties with its place branding campaigns (Belabas, 2023). Rotterdam's place brand, 'Rotterdam. Make it Happen' (RMIH) is aimed at promoting Rotterdam as an innovative, international, entrepreneurial and diverse city (Belabas, 2023; Rotterdam Make It Happen, 2020). With its new ambition to engage and include the residents in the place brand, the city expanded its focus to targeting 'frontrunners', described as bold, forward and cultured people, who are intrinsically motivated to contribute to the city's growth (Rotterdam Make It Happen, 2020).

However, the question remains whether citizens identify with the place brand after these adaptations and if this has had any impact on their embodiment of the brand values as active and innovative frontrunners of the city. Therefore, the research question of this study is *'How do residents' perceptions of the 'Rotterdam. Make it happen' place brand influence their propensity for civic engagement, through their brand identification?'*

This study aims to understand how residents view Rotterdam's place brand and to investigate the potential relationship between place branding, identification and civic engagement. Based on this research aim and the research question, the following sub-questions have been formulated:

1. How do residents perceive the 'Rotterdam. Make It Happen' place brand?
2. What is the degree of residents' brand identification with 'Rotterdam. Make It Happen'?
3. How do residents describe their propensity for engaging in civic activities in Rotterdam?

1.1.1 Scientific relevance

In general, there is limited knowledge on how branding affects individuals' behaviour and attitudes, in particular, prosocial behaviours such as civic engagement (Wilson et al.,

2023). Place branding literature often focuses on brand management, the involvement of stakeholders, including residents, in the branding process or how more inclusive branding processes affect their perceptions and attitudes towards a brand (Braun et al., 2013; Braun et al., 2018; Eshuis & Klijn, 2012; Ripoll et al., 2025). This research attempts to fill that gap by offering a holistic perspective on branding and civic engagement. Furthermore, it brings together different theoretical disciplines, such as marketing, psychology and urban studies. It contributes to future empirical research by providing a deeper understanding of how branding can impact civic attitudes, such as civic engagement.

1.1.2 Societal relevance

Furthermore, in terms of urban governance, this study offers practical insights on how place branding may serve as a tool for encouraging civic engagement amongst residents. By assessing how residents perceive and identify with RMIH, this study sheds light on the effectiveness of branding policies and strategies aimed at enhancing civic attitudes amongst residents. Moreover, RMIH stated in its recent multi-year strategy to strive toward a more improved societal impact of the brand (Rotterdam. Make it Happen, 2025). This research offers a snapshot of the brand's current societal impact by assessing its impact on residents' perception, identification and propensity for civic engagement. In addition, it offers insight into residents' satisfaction with the current branding of their city, which could give insight into the effectiveness of the brand and could provide recommendations to enhance residents' resonance with the brand.

1.2 Research Structure

The next chapter will present the different theoretical concepts underlying the main research variables, brand perception, brand identification and propensity for civic engagement. It will outline theoretical discussion about the relations between these variables and illustrate them by means of a conceptual model.

The third chapter outlines this study's data collection, sampling and data analysis methods. Moreover, it presents an operationalisation of the main research variables. Furthermore, Chapter four presents and discusses the findings of the data analysis. Additionally, it provides an evaluation of the key findings through a discussion. Lastly, Chapter five concludes this study, answering the research and sub-questions and offering practical recommendations.

2. Theoretical framework

This chapter provides a systematic overview of the related theories of the main concepts in this study. The three variables, place brand perception, place brand identification and propensity for civic engagement, are defined and conceptualised. Furthermore, this chapter discusses the connection between the perception of place branding and the propensity for civic engagement. Based on the literature, brand identification could potentially function as an explanatory mechanism between the dependent and independent variables. Lastly, the conceptual model is presented.

2.1 Civic Engagement and the Propensity to Engage in Civic Actions

Residents' engagement in civic activities is often called civic engagement. There is no universally agreed-upon definition of civic engagement; however, most of the literature defines it as engaging in personal activities that address matters of public interest (Arvanitidis, 2017; Grillo et al., 2010; Skarmeas et al., 2020). Skarmeas et al. (2020) defined it as a mobilising power that can garner public support through changing an individual's behaviour. It encompasses different forms of civic action, namely formal, such as voting or informal, such as volunteering, protesting or participating in community initiatives, donating and socially conscious purchasing (Arvanitidis, 2017; Chung & Shim, 2020; Skarmeas et al., 2020).

Civic engagement is not only defined by civic activities but also contains deeper social and psychological dimensions. According to Grillo et al. (2010), civic engagement is a manifestation of social capital and is more than a set of actions but also refers to an individual's sense of belonging, investment and ownership to a community, whether local, regional or national. Individuals who are civically inclined tend to focus on the common good, see themselves as part of the community and view societal problems as their own, and therefore want to have a say in shaping and improving that community (Colby et al. 2000; Arvanitidis, 2017). These types of individuals thus have a certain propensity for civic engagement, which is defined as the likelihood for an individual to engage civically, based on their commitment and capacity (Kim et al., 2024).

Civic commitment is defined as one's value and sense of responsibility towards civic engagement, which can be determined by one's personal values, ideology and sense of belonging (Arvanitidis, 2017; Kim et al., 2024). Civic capacity is defined as one's ability to engage in civic life, which is not solely shaped by a person's skills, education and income but

also their awareness of societal problems and civic agency in their community (Arvanitidis, 2017; Kim et al., 2024; Saegert, 2006).

Furthermore, according to Kerby (2024) and Pavlova et al. (2022), this could be further explained by Schifter and Ajzen's (1985) Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB). This theory focuses on predicting an individual's propensity to perform a certain action. The theory is based on three elements: an individual's attitude, subjective norms and their perceived behavioural control. When applying this to civic engagement, a person's values and beliefs regarding civic engagement, the social pressure to engage in civic activities and their perception of the ease or difficulty of those activities shape their propensity (Kerby, 2024; Pavlova et al., 2022).

2.2 Place Branding and Perceptions

As literature has shown, civic engagement is somewhat related to how individuals perceive and relate to their community. Place branding can play a significant role in shaping this relationship, as it shapes or reframes the identity and image of a place. Zenker and Braun (2010) define place branding as a network of associations people form in their minds about a place, shaped by its visual identity, language, and actions. These associations reflect the goals, communication style, values, behaviours, and shared culture of the place's stakeholders, as well as the overall design of the place itself. Thus, place branding is used to influence the perception of a certain place; it does so with the use of brands (Eshuis & Klijn, 2017). A brand is "a symbolic construct that consists of a name, term, sign, symbol, or design or a combination of these, created deliberately to identify a phenomenon and differentiate it from a similar phenomenon by adding particular meaning to it" (Eshuis & Klijn, 2012, p.19). These symbolic constructs function both on the neurological and social psychological level, using visual and emotional stimuli to evoke association and create meaning (Eshuis & Ripoll, 2025).

Branding originated in the private sector, but is increasingly being used by the public sector. The private sector focuses more on branding as a sales or marketing approach for promoting products, whilst in the public sector, branding is more often applied to cities, states, nations, destinations, organisations, or people (Zavattaro & Thomas, 2021). In particular place branding in the public sector is being utilized as an urban governance strategy to: (1) shape and oversee the perceptions related to urban areas and their growth; (2) engage and connect stakeholders to the city; and (3) convey information to the broader context

through the media (Eshuis & Klijn, 2017; Eshuis & Klijn, 2012). This study will focus on place branding as a strategy for urban governance to shape and manage perceptions.

2.2.1 Place brand perception

Place branding influences people's perceptions by triggering emotional and psychological associations of a place in their minds (Braun et al., 2013; Eshuis & Ripoll, 2025). Place brand perception is defined as an individual's subjective understanding of how the city presents itself through its brand image and its communicated brand identity (Ruzzier & De Chernatony, 2013; Zavattaro & Thomas, 2021; Zenker & Braun, 2010). Brand image is the set of beliefs or associations people relate to a brand (Vitiello & Willcocks, 2006; Zavattaro & Thomas, 2021). This is shaped by the perceptions of the physical attributes of a place brand, its activities and the meaning it evokes in its audience (Bellabas, 2023; Khirfan & Momani, 2013).

Brand identity is formed by associated brand elements such as images, slogans, and logos that the brand manager controls and communicates, usually reflecting the brand's overall values and mission. According to Kavaratzis (2008) brand communication can be categorised into three types: 1) primary communication, which unintentional communication shaped by the cities's governance, urban design and infrastructure; 2) secondary communication, this intentional and formal communication that is shaped by marketing practices such as advertising, public relations and graphic design; 3) lastly, there is tertiary communication, which is a line of communication that is not controlled by the brand manager that spreads via word-of-mouth by for example residents or the media. Compared with secondary communication, primary or tertiary communication that a person receives can vary greatly based on their social and physical surroundings (Kavaratzis, 2008). Thus, this research will focus primarily on secondary brand communication to compare residents' place brand perception more effectively.

For secondary brand communication to be perceived positively, it needs to reflect the residents' reality (Braun et al., 2013; Braun et al., 2018; Kavaratzis, 2008). A brand can do this through aligning its brand image with its brand identity (Zavattaro & Thomas, 2021). However, the perception of place brand cannot be fully controlled; brand elements, in particular the symbols, can have different meanings for different people (Braun et al., 2013). Positive place brand perception is shaped by the extent to which the brand image aligns with the brand identity. Thus, how much a person's reality and experience of a place is reflected in the manner a place brand is being overall viewed and promoted (Janonis et al., 2007;

Zavattaro & Thomas, 2021; Zenker & Petersen, 2014). When the brand identity and the brand image do not align, it can create misalignment, which can result in disillusionment or even resistance to the brand. This makes it harder for the residents to identify with the brand and perceive it positively (Ripoll et al., 2025; Yu & Kim, 2020).

2.3 The Link Between Place Brand Perception and Propensity for Civic Engagement: Place Identification

It is broadly stated in literature that place branding shapes perception through creating favourable mental images of a place (Ashworth & Kavaratzis, 2018; Braun et al., 2013; Eshuis & Klein, 2012; Zavattaro & Thomas, 2021). However, there is a lack of research on the direct effect of place brand perception on civic engagement. Most research explores the opposite relationship, namely that civic engagement in branding leads to more reputable, inclusive and effective place brands (Belabas, 2023; Braun et al., 2013). Some research has a critical view of branding, stating that other scholars overestimate place branding's influence on behaviours and attitudes (Ripoll et al., 2025).

Though there have been studies partially relating brand perception to prosocial behaviours and attitudes, for instance, Bang et al. (2014) research showed that a brand's reputation, thus how it is perceived, influenced the consumer's attitudes, affecting their intention to engage in civic actions, particularly volunteering. This study illustrates that people with a positive perception of a brand can be more prone to engage in prosocial behaviour and embody behaviours that align with the brand. Besides that, a study of Barnhardt et al. (2015) found that perception could affect their commitment or perceived capacity for civic engagement influence (Barnhardt et al., 2015; Kim et al., 2024). They researched the extent to which students viewed their campus as a place that advocates citizenship behaviour, positively affecting their civic engagement propensity. Though these findings are not explicitly related to residents and place branding, they illustrate a potential relation between brand perception and civic engagement. Thus, it could be assumed that a place brand is perceived positively and as encouraging citizenship behaviour, which could in turn lead to a higher propensity for civic engagement.

2.3.1 Place brand perception and place brand identification

However, this potential relationship is not quite evident, as there might be a more complex explanatory mechanism behind it (Sadeque et al., 2022; Taecharungroj, 2016). The effect of place brand perception on residents' propensity for civic engagement requires a

deeper understanding of how perception ultimately leads to attitudes and potential behaviours. As stated in the previous section, positive place brand perception is shaped by the extent to which a person's reality and lived experiences of the place, brand image, correspond with the brand identity. The higher this alignment and the more positive the perception, the more likely a person is to identify with the place brand that is promoting (Belabas, 2023; Taecharungroj, 2016; Zavattaro & Thomas, 2021). Some scholars term this as 'city brand love' or city identification, while others call it brand identification; both define the concept as establishing a connection between an individual's identity and that of the place brand (Belabas, 2023; Sadeque et al., 2022; Taecharungroj, 2016; Zenker & Petersen, 2014). For consistency, this concept will be referred to as place brand identification in this research.

Place brand identification is formed when a person perceives a similarity between their own identity and the brand (Zenker & Petersen, 2014). According to Zenker & Petersen (2014), place brand perception is shaped by individuals' identity fit, attractiveness of identification and optimal distinctness. Identity fit is the similarity between an individual's identity and that of the brand; it demonstrates the alignment between personal values and norms and those of the brand. Attractiveness of identification is the extent to which an individual is drawn to the appeal of a brand. According to Zenker and Petersen (2014), individuals who are drawn to a brand often compartmentalise its negative traits and emphasise its positive traits as they view the brand as an extension of themselves. Lastly, optimal distinctness is the need for individuals to feel both a sense of belonging and a sense of uniqueness in relation to the brand's identity. According to Zenker and Petersen (2014), place brand identification is not about a perfect identity match between individuals and the brand, but the flexibility for individuals to align with the brand in their own way. This requires open, diverse and inclusive brand narratives, as it makes it more likely for different types of residents to identify with the brand.

2.3.2 Place brand identification and propensity for civic engagement

Place brand identification can lead to a higher propensity for civic engagement among residents (Sadeque et al., 2022; Taecharungroj, 2016; Zenker & Petersen, 2014), partly by promoting prosocial attitudes. Research shows that an individual's identity affects their future behaviour, through affecting behaviour net of attitude (Stedman, 2002). As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, the Theory of Planned Behaviour states that attitudes, social norms and perceived behavioural control can determine whether a person has the propensity to perform a certain action or behaviour (Kerby, 2024; Pavlova et al., 2022; Skarmeas et al.,

2020). The symbolic images and meaning shaped and emphasised through place branding can lead to cognitive beliefs, hence place brand identification, which in turn can form the building blocks for prosocial attitudes (Stedman, 2002; Zenker & Petersen, 2014)

For instance, a study by Taecharungroj (2016) found that brand identification can lead to city citizenship behaviour. Taecharungroj (2016) defines civic citizenship behaviour as the behaviours of residents that contribute to the city by helping other people and participating in events that can improve the city (p.4). This could be interpreted as civic engagement, as both emphasise prosocial behaviours. According to Zenker and Petersen (2014), identification leads to prosocial attitudes such as higher civic commitment and place attachment. Civic commitment influences civic engagement and creates a sense of responsibility (Kim et al., 2024; Zenker & Petersen, 2014). Place attachment fosters a sense of ownership and agency, which could in turn lead to an increased sense of civic capacity (Kim et al., 2024; Sadeque et al., 2022; Taecharungroj, 2016; Zenker & Petersen, 2014). This can motivate and empower residents to engage civically in their area.

2.4 Conceptual Framework

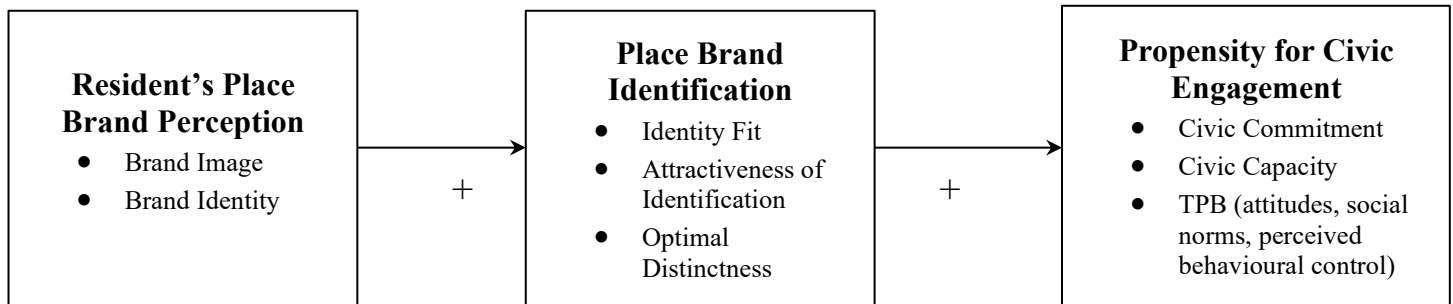
Figure 1 illustrates the relationship between residents' place brand perception, brand identification, and propensity for civic engagement. Firstly, brand perception is conceptualised as a resident's interpretation of a brand's image and identity (Ruzzier & De Chernatony, 2013; Zavattaro & Thomas, 2021; Zenker & Braun, 2010). Alignment between the perceived image and promoted brand identity forms a positive place brand perception (Zavattaro & Thomas, 2021). This positive place brand perception can foster place brand identification, which is conceptualised as the extent to which residents establish a connection between their identity and the place brand (Ripoll et al., 2025; Yu & Kim, 2020; Zenker & Petersen, 2014). Which is formed by the extent to which a resident experiences identity fit, attractiveness of identification and optimal distinctness. Thus, those who perceive a similarity between their personal traits and values and those of the brand, those who find the brand appealing, open and flexible, which is more likely when they view the brand positively (Ripoll et al., 2025; Yu & Kim, 2020).

According to various research, residents who identify with the place brand might feel a stronger sense of belonging, attachment and ownership towards the city and display more prosocial behaviours (Sadeque et al., 2022; Taecharungroj, 2016; Zenker & Petersen, 2014). This can embolden their civic commitment and civic capacity, which are two key dimensions of civic engagement propensity. TPB reinforces this, as identification can positively influence

attitudes, social norms and behavioural control; all of which influence residents' propensity for civic engagement (Kerby, 2024; Pavlova et al., 2022; Stedman, 2002).

This conceptual framework presumes that place brand perception will have a positive influence on brand identification, which in turn will have a positive effect on residents' propensity for civic engagement.

Figure 1.
Conceptual Model



3. Method

Based on the theory, this chapter reflects on the research designs used in this study. Furthermore, the main concepts, place brand perception, place brand identification, and propensity for civic engagement, were operationalised. Lastly, the reliability, validity, privacy and ethical considerations of this research design were addressed.

3.1 Research Design

To answer the research question, this study aimed to explore how a resident's place brand perception influences their propensity for civic engagement and how their place brand identification acts as an explanatory mechanism in this potential relationship. This was done by conducting qualitative research, through a single-case study, with a content analysis as a secondary data collection method and semi-structured interviews as a primary data collection method. For this research, Rotterdam's place brand was used as a critical case to research this potential relationship. Such a critical case can test the significance of theories discussed in Chapter 2, as it is a suitable context for researching the main research variables (Yin, 2009). Due to its distinctive place brand slogan, 'Rotterdam. Make it Happen', which communicated a clear call to action, emphasising Rotterdam's can-do mentality, resilience and perseverance. Furthermore, as was stated in its multi-year strategy, the brand explicitly targets residents alongside other internal and external stakeholders (Rotterdam. Make it Happen, 2025).

Qualitative case study research allowed for richer and more detailed descriptions of a specific social phenomenon than other methods (Van Thiel, 2021). It provided a more holistic understanding of residents' perception, identification and propensity for civic engagement. Content analysis was a suitable method to study the conveyed messages and constructed meanings in an existing data source (Van Thiel, 2021). Hence, with this method, this study aimed to gain a clear understanding of the 'Make It Happen' brand identity based on its secondary brand communication, by examining brand elements, narratives and visual/textual markers. To achieve this, the place brand's strategy documents, campaign website and promotional videos were analysed. The output of this analysis was used to inform the interview topic list and brand cues to present to participants during the interviews.

Furthermore, semi-structured interviews served as the primary data collection. Semi-structured interviews offer flexibility and allow respondents room for their own interpretations (Knot et al., 2022). Thus, this method was suitable, since this study aimed to capture residents' perception of the 'Make it Happen' place brand, whether they identify with it and their propensity for civic engagement. The interviews were conducted in Dutch and English using a topic list (see [Appendix A](#)) and lasted around 30 to 45 minutes. During the interviews, probing questions were asked to uncover the linkages between the main research concepts.

Moreover, based on the content analysis, the brand movie of RMIH, [Appendix B](#) - Video 1, was selected and shown during the interviews, as it represented the brand's message and identity. This was done because, as stated in chapter 2, place branding evokes meaning through imagery, symbols and visuals. Therefore, to effectively evoke respondents' brand perceptions and identifications, it was imperative for respondents to be shown the brand's visual and symbolic elements during the interviews.

3.1.1 Sampling

As mentioned, this study conducted both a content analysis and interviews. The selection of material for the content analysis was based on three criteria: the material must 1) be produced or endorsed by the municipality of Rotterdam or official brand partners; 2) explicitly communicate or promote 'Rotterdam. Make It Happen'; 3) and be public-facing. See [Appendix B](#) for an overview of the selected materials.

The population of this study were those living in the municipality of Rotterdam who are aware of the 'Rotterdam. Make It Happen' place brand. In terms of the interviews, 11 respondents were selected through purposive sampling, in particular, maximum variation.

This allowed for a more diverse sample and enabled multiple perspectives to be accounted for in this study, as perceptions could significantly vary per person based on their social and physical environment (Creswell & Creswell, 2022). Therefore, the aim was to select respondents from different parts of the city (North, East, West and South of Rotterdam), of different ages and educational backgrounds. These respondents were recruited with the use of different social media platforms, such as LinkedIn, Facebook, WhatsApp and Instagram. See [Appendix C](#) for an overview of the respondents.

3.1.2 Qualitative analysis

The data from the content analysis and interviews were analysed through thematic analysis. It was suitable for analysing perception, opinions and experiences (Ahmed et al., 2025), which was fitting for this research as it is based on residents' perceptions and propensity. This was done through identifying patterns of meaning within the data, through familiarisation, coding, generating and analysing themes. The coding was done through an iterative process by combining both deductive and inductive coding; this way, new themes could emerge from the data whilst also assessing the theoretical assumptions of this study (Knott et al., 2022; Babbie, 2016). All data had been coded and analysed through the qualitative data analysis software Atlas.ti. In terms of the interviews, all interview data had been transcribed and translated into English if necessary.

3.2 Operationalisation

As mentioned, this study had three main research variables, namely place brand perception, place brand identification and propensity for civic engagement. To measure these variables, they were further conceptualised and operationalised. [Table 1](#) provided an extensive overview of the operationalised concepts. Based on this operationalisation, an interview topic list was formulated, see [Appendix A](#).

3.2.1 Place brand perception

Firstly, to measure the independent variable, place brand perception was conceptualised as residents' subjective interpretation of how the city presented itself through its image and communicated identity (Ruzzier & De Chernatony, 2013; Zenker & Braun, 2010). This was shaped through the dynamic interactions between its dimensions, brand identity and brand image. The former was how the city was being presented through different brand elements, and the latter was how residents experience and interpret these elements

(Janonis et al., 2007; Zavattaro & Thomas, 2021). A resident's place brand perception was considered positive when there was a similarity between the brand identity and their brand image (Braun et al., 2018; Zavattaro & Thomas, 2021).

According to Ruzzier and De Chernatony (2013), place brand identity was shaped by a brand's vision, mission, values, personality, benefits and distinguishing preferences. A brand's vision and mission represented the main purpose of the brand and what it wanted to achieve, which was indicated by its goals and strategies. Values represented what the brand stood for and shaped the brand's behaviour and interaction style (De Chernatony, 1999; Ruzzier & De Chernatony, 2013). A brand's values were indicated by the main themes and core principles promoted in its messaging. Furthermore, a brand's personality was indicated by the presented traits of its target group and the lifestyle it promoted. Moreover, a brand's benefits were the rewards the place brand offered, according to the brand managers. A brand's distinguishing preferences were shaped by the place brand's unique elements that set it apart from other place brands. These could be functional, such as the city's beautiful skyline, or psychological, such as the city's vibrant atmosphere. See [Table 1](#) for a further overview of all these indicators.

Brand image consisted of three factors. First, the physical attributes that residents associate with the place brand (Bellabas, 2023). These were tangible characteristics of a place brand, such as the urban design and infrastructure of the city, well-known landmarks or physical brand materials, such as posters or banners. The second type of factor was the activities residents associated with the place and or brand, such as public services, social events, and urban projects. This was implied through their experiences and the perceived benefits of these activities (Bellabas, 2023; Keller, 2003). Lastly, the meanings that the place brand evoked, which were indicated by residents' overall opinions, feelings and attitudes of the city and its place brand. For instance, a place brand could evoke positive opinions, feelings of belonging among its residents (Sadeque et al., 2022; Taecharungroj, 2016). Hence, an example interview question for this concept was: "What type of visuals or symbols do you relate to Rotterdam?".

3.2.2 Place brand identification

The explanatory mechanism, brand identification, was conceptualised as the extent to which residents established a connection between their identity and the place brand (Zenker et al., 2017; Zenker & Petersen, 2014). Brand identification consisted of three dimensions: identity fit, attractiveness of identification and optimal distinctness. Identity fit was the level

of similarity of a resident's identity and the brand's identity, which was indicated by a perceived similarity between personal values/traits and that of the place brand and whether residents saw themselves as the brand's target audience (Zenker et al., 2017).

The attractiveness of identification was the extent to which residents perceived a brand's identity as appealing and believed that it positively enhanced their own identity. Indicators are a positive place (brand) image, which is the perceived reputation of the place. Moreover, the compartmentalisation of negative place characteristics which is when individuals downplayed the negative aspect of a place and instead highlighted positive aspects.

Lastly, optimal distinctness was residents' search for an optimal balance between embracing the core attributes of a place brand whilst maintaining their uniqueness (Zenker et al., 2017; Zenker & Petersen, 2014). This was indicated by the perceived openness of the brand's identity and their freedom to pick and choose which brand attributes they identified with (identification flexibility). Based on this operationalisation, an example question to measure place brand identification was: "Are there certain aspects of Rotterdam, and its promoted place brand, that you identify more with than others?"

3.2.3 Propensity for civic engagement

Lastly, the dependent variable, propensity for civic engagement, was conceptualised in this study as the likelihood for an individual to engage civically based on their commitment and capacity (Kim et al., 2024). Based on the theory mentioned in the theoretical framework, this could be explained by civic commitment, civic capacity and the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB). According to Kim et al. (2024), civic commitment was indicated by an individual's sense of responsibility. Additionally, indicators for civic capacity were an individual's awareness of social issues, sense of empowerment and competence. An example interview question was: "To what extent do you feel a sense of responsibility to contribute positively to your city? "

Besides that, TPB stated that an individual's intention to engage in a certain behaviour was indicated by their attitude, subjective norms and perceived behavioural control (Kerby, 2024; Pavlova et al., 2022). According to Skarmeas et al. (2020), an individual's attitude towards civic engagement was shaped by their expectations of the favourable or unfavourable consequences of engaging civically. Social norms were determined by the social pressure, approval and expectations of peers and family to engage in civic behaviour. Perceived behavioural control was shaped by an individual's belief in their ability to engage civically,

based on their skills, resources and opportunities. An example question for one of these TPB indicators was: “Do you experience any social pressure to engage in civic actions, such as voting, volunteering, protesting, participating in community initiatives, donating or socially conscious purchasing?”.

Table 1.

Operationalisation scheme of main research variables

Variables	Dimensions	Sub-dimensions	Indicators	Source of data	Literature
Brand Perception	Brand identity	Vision and Mission	The brand’s purpose	Content analysis	(De Chernatony, 1999; Ruzzier & De Chernatony, 2013)
			Stated brand goals and objectives.		
			Brand strategies		
		Values	The main brand themes.		
			Core principles are promoted in brand materials and messaging.		
		Personality	Expressed traits of residents.		
			Promoted lifestyles (i.e. healthy, circular)		
	Brand image	Benefits	Rewards place brand offers, according to brand managers.	Semi-structured Interviews	(Bellabas, 2023; Keller, 2003; Khirfan & Momani, 2013; Sadeque et al. 2022; Taecharungroj ; 2016)
		Distinguishing preferences	Unique functional place attractions and attributes.		
			Unique psychological place attractions and attributes.		
	Brand image	Physical attributes of the place (brand) that residents perceive as characteristic of the place.	Tangible elements, such as Urban design, infrastructure architecture, and campaign materials, such as posters.		
		Awareness and experiences of place-specific activities that set the brand apart from others.	Public services, social events, or urban projects that are perceived to be related to the brand.		
			Perceived benefits or value of associated activities.		
		Meanings the place brand evokes (Opinions, feelings, and attitudes).	Opinions of the brand (positive, negative, neutral);		
			Feelings (pride, belonging, ownership, disengagement).		
			Attitudes (support/no support).		

Variables	Dimensions	Sub-dimensions	Indicators	Source of data	Literature
Brand Identification	Identity fit	Perceived similarity of values and traits.	Conflating the brand's values with one's personal values.	Semi-structured Interviews	(Zenker et al., 2017; Zenker & Petersen, 2014)
		Feeling part of the target audience	Feeling represented by or part of the identity the brand portrays.		
	Attractiveness of identification	Positive place (brand) image	Believing the place (brand) has a positive reputation and is overall positively viewed.		
		Compartmentalisation of negative characteristics	Downplaying negative place aspects.		
			Solely highlighting positive place aspects.		
	Optimal distinctness	Perceived openness and flexibility of brand identity.	Perceived inclusiveness of the brand.		
			Perceived multidimensionality of the brand identity.		
Propensity for Civic Engagement	Civic Commitment	A sense of responsibility to engage in civic behaviour.	A sense of duty or accountability towards the city.	Semi-structured Interviews	(Kim et al., 2024)
	Civic Capacity	Awareness of social issues	Staying informed about local news and issues in the city.	Semi-structured Interviews	(Kim et al., 2024)
		Competence	The belief in the adequacy of one's skills.		
			The belief in the adequacy of one's knowledge.		
	Theory of Planned Behaviour	Sense of empowerment	Believe in one's ability to make a difference through engaging in civic actions.	Semi-structured Interviews	(Kerby, 2024; Skarmeas et al., 2020)
		Attitudes toward civic engagement.	Opinions and perceived consequences of engaging in civic actions.		
		Social norms	Perceived pressure to civically engage.		
			Approval of peers and family to behave civically.		
			Motivation to comply with peers' and family expectations.		
		Perceived behavioural control	The perceived ease or difficulty of engaging in civic activities.		

3.3 Validity and Reliability

The validity of this research relied on triangulation. Triangulation ensured validity by using different data sources and methods. This approach was chosen in order to provide rich and thick descriptions of the research findings, by collecting as much and as varied information as possible (Van Thiel, 2021). For instance, a content analysis was used to examine various types of sources, including both written and visual materials. The content analysis created a frame of reference for the rest of the research, thereby contributing to the internal validity of this study.

However, due to the small number of respondents and this study's focus on a single case study, external validity was limited. This study ensured a degree of generalizability through maximum variation, thereby recruiting a diverse pool of respondents who were representative of the different types of residents in Rotterdam. As Flyvbjerg (2006) explained, single case studies can achieve generalisation through their strategic selection of cases or respondents that offer the most information possible to be collected on the research topic of interest. Furthermore, by creating a comprehensive operationalisation based on the theoretical framework that guided the interviews and content analysis, this study ensured both construct validity, content validity and reliability.

Besides that, to ensure this study's reliability further, all interviews were conducted using a topic list, and an operationalisation/coding scheme was followed as a basis for analysis and coding the data. Moreover, practice interviews were conducted to test the topic list and improve the quality of the interviews by gathering feedback from peers and refining the interview questions. In addition, to ensure the content analysis was accurate and reliable, the findings were verified through following up with a brand manager (informant) of RMIH. This member checking was done to minimise bias and ensure that the researcher's interpretations are aligned with the truth and reality of the informant (Creswell & Creswell, 2022).

3.4 Privacy and Ethical Considerations

This study has taken a number of measures to ensure respondents' privacy and to comply with the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). Firstly, all respondents remained anonymous, and their personal data was pseudonymized. Furthermore, data such as transcripts and audio recordings were stored securely.

Moreover, all respondents have been asked for their informed consent (see [Appendix E](#)). This is when respondents give their written permission for their data to be used for

research purposes and agree to participate in the study (Van Thiel, 2021). Respondents had the option to skip questions or withdraw their participation from the study at any time.

4. Results

This chapter first describes the case of ‘Rotterdam. Make It Happen’ place brand. Thereafter, it provides a frame of reference for the other findings of this research by delving into its brand identity, based on the data from the content analysis. Furthermore, the findings of the main research variables are discussed. Starting with the resident's place brand perception, and thereafter their brand identification. Ending the chapter with their propensity for civic engagement and the impact of place brand perception.

4.1 Case Description (RMIH)

Rotterdam is known as a diverse, vibrant and modern city that has gone through significant transformation, after its bombing in the Second World War (Belabas & Eshuis, 2018). It is home to approximately 671.000 residents from various ethnic, economic and educational backgrounds (Municipality of Rotterdam, 2024). Rotterdam is mainly known for its port, and its do'er mentality, however, each area of the city (west, east, north and south) has a unique character and composition.

The place brand and the city's slogan, Rotterdam. Make It Happen (RMIH) was created in 2014 (Rotterdam Make It Happen, 2020), see figure 2. However, this is not Rotterdam's first place brand before RMIH the city was branded as ‘Rotterdam World Port, World City’ (Belabas & Eshuis, 2018). It focused on external branding, promoting the city as a way to attract foreign investors and visitors. This way of branding was unfavourable to the city's residents. As a result, RMIH was introduced as a more inclusive and internally-focused place brand, though keeping some external elements, that centres all relevant stakeholders, including residents (Belabas & Eshuis, 2018; Belabas, 2023).

The purpose of the brand is to promote Rotterdam as an innovative, international, entrepreneurial and diverse city through a joint brand campaign between the municipality, Rotterdam Partners, Erasmus University, Port of Rotterdam, Rotterdam Festivals, Rotterdam Topsport and Erasmus MC (Belabas, 2023; Rotterdam Make It Happen, 2020). Since its

Figure 2.
Brand Slogan and Logo



Note. By Rotterdam. Make it Happen, 2020

inspection, the brand has gained 33 additional brand partners, with the goal of fostering an effective joint brand campaign where different stakeholders work together to give meaning to RMIH.

With this place brand, the city is trying to target ‘frontrunners’, who are described as bold, forward and cultured people, who are intrinsically motivated to contribute to the city's growth (Rotterdam Make It Happen, 2020). Frontrunners are considered both as the residents, local talent and entrepreneurs as visitors and international businesses (Rotterdam Make It Happen, 2025). However, since 2018, the brand has gradually been focusing more on the residents and trying to promote community, citizenship and civic pride, by branding the city as a place where opportunities and growth are fostered through the ambitions and actions of its residents (Belabas & Eshuis, 2018; Belabas, 2023). This increased focus on engaging residents also reflects the municipality's ambitions of the past few years of increasing civic engagement among its residents and increasing their involvement in the city (Visser et al., 2024; Municipality of Rotterdam, 2022).

The next section of this chapter goes more in-depth into RMIH’s brand identity and its subtle nudges to civic engagement and citizen activation in its secondary brand materials.

4.2 Brand Identity

From the content analysis, RMIH’s brand identity was identified through its objectives, values, personality, promoted benefits and uniqueness (see [Appendix D](#) for the code tree).

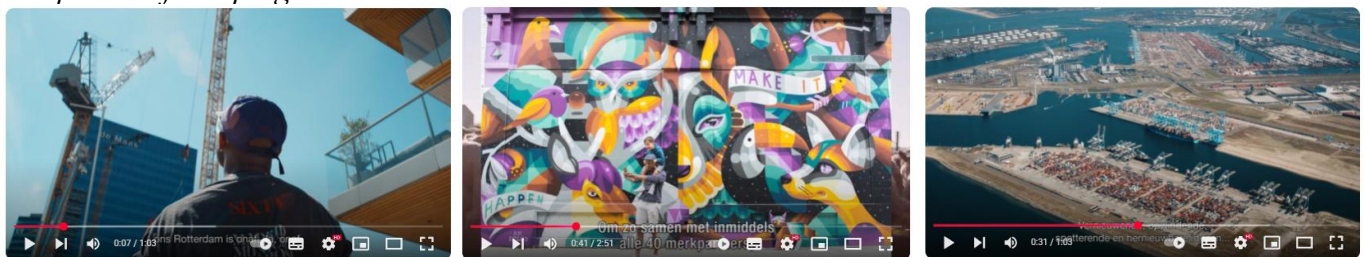
The brand materials highlighted both short and long-term objectives. The short-term objectives centred around fostering connection, collaboration and innovation through storytelling. Another objective was strengthening its brand positioning, through expanding the brand’s reach, visibility and credibility, as it wants to attract more frontrunners. In the long term, the brand wants to be future-proof, elevate Rotterdam to the world stage and contribute to the further growth and development of the city through its partnerships and campaigns.

The brand values and personality were mainly derived from the brand culture, history and the lifestyle it promotes. Firstly, the brand promotes the city as diverse, worldly and international, often showing people from diverse backgrounds in its campaigns and having brand materials available in both Dutch and English. Besides that, the brand significantly prides itself on the city and its people for their can-do mentality. This is particularly apparent from its brand materials, such as a quote from a video campaign ([Appendix B](#) - Video 1):

“So what would Rotterdam be like tomorrow? Well, I don't know, you tell me it's in your hands. So you make it happen”. The words ‘Make it happen’ already imply some type of proactivity or action being expected from the city and its people, most likely residents, as the video centres on different types of residents experiencing the city. Building on that, the brand promotes the lifestyle of the average Rotterdam resident as one of pioneers living in a healthy, circular, vibrant and smart city, with visuals of the arts, port-industry and urban development in the forefront of its campaigns, see figure 3 for an example.

Lastly, the benefits and uniqueness of the brand. Based on strategic documents ([Appendix B](#) - Documents 1 and 2), the brand offers knowledge and skill exchange through its alliance, partnerships and collaboration, which can lead to further opportunities, potential solutions and improvements for the city. The brand claims to create visibility for the city and foster societal impact through different events, such as the Marathon, Eurovision Song Festival and Rooftop Days. Furthermore, the brand claims to set the city apart from other cities by also focusing on the city’s rawness and promoting it as unfinished, recognising its imperfections. Despite that, the city is still able to prosper through its ambitious culture, boldness and forward-thinking mindset.

Figure 3.
Snapshots of campaign video's



Note. By Rotterdam. Make it Happen. www.youtube.com/@rotterdam.makeithappen.5380

4.3 Residents' Brand Image

Now that there is a deeper understanding of RMIH’s brand identity, this next part will delve into residents’ brand image that was analysed from the interviews, by focusing on perceived physical attributes of the brand, the associated activities and the meanings the brand evokes. (See Appendix C for respondent descriptions).

4.3.1 Physical attributes

From the interviews, it became apparent that some visuals, symbols and places were repeatedly associated by the respondents with the city and RMIH when asked about its

physical attributes. For instance, the majority of respondents when asked to describe the city, mentioned symbols and visuals associated with the city centre, icons such as the Erasmus Bridge, the Cube houses or the Markthal. With places and symbols outside the city centre rarely mentioned, except for Kop van Zuid, Feyenoord stadium and Ahoy. Brand campaigns are often seen on banners and posters around the train station and construction sites in the city centre. Whilst most respondents who lived closer to the city centre did not express an issue with this, others, such as Chris, who lives in Rotterdam South, felt that the brand's portrayal excluded some parts of the city:

“Well, I don't see much inclusivity in the campaign that I've seen. And then I'll take the example that, as a person living in the south, I simply see less of the campaign than people in the centre. And if you look at the website and the partners of the ‘Make It Happen’ campaign, for example, you'll also see that only two are located in the south, and the rest are all above the Maas. (Chris - R10)”

This shows that some physical attributes of the branding campaign are heavily focused or not equally visible in all parts of the city, with some places receiving more attention and being more included than others.

4.3.2 Activities

Besides the physical attributes, respondents were also asked to identify specific activities they associate with the brand. Seven of the eleven respondents had initially had difficulty answering this question, for reasons such as the brand not being visible during events, not having enough knowledge about the different activities in the city or lack of engagement and involvement in brand events. For instance, when asked about this, Alex explained: “Yes, I think there's still a lot to be done in that regard and to raise awareness of the brand”. This suggests that the brand's presence in city activities is somewhat limited and unclear, according to these seven respondents.

However, when probed further, all eleven respondents were able to answer the question, and mentioned either sports events or arts and culture events to be likely associated with RMIH, such as the Rotterdam Marathon, Summer Carnival and Museum Nights. This was likely due to several respondents having personally experienced these events and being able to identify RMIH's involvement. From the brand activities the respondents were able to identify, the majority had a positive opinion on them. Respondents mentioned that they found the brand activities enjoyable, unifying and made them feel part of the city. Furthermore,

respondents also mentioned that brand activities, such as the ones mentioned, make the city look more attractive and promote the city.

Though these respondents found brand activities to be valuable, others expressed dissatisfaction or indifference to them. In particular, Chris expressed that due to political reasons they felt dissatisfied with high-profile RMIH related events, such as Eurovision or Kingsday: “Because back then, yes, we [the city] were kind of the poster children for that campaign, and I noticed that at the time. So that leaves a rather bad taste in my mouth.”. This shows how personal ideologies can influence perceptions of brand activities. Besides that, Rebecca expressed somewhat of a disinterest in the RMIH activities, as she believed the events to be more catered towards visitors and less interesting for the residents.

4.3.3 Meanings

Lastly, respondents also shared their general feelings, opinions and attitude towards RMIH. The respondents who viewed the brand somewhat positively expressed feelings of pride and hopefulness due to the brand’s message shown in its brand campaign. Respondents felt the brand campaign reminded them of all the positive aspects of the city, and gave them hope for Rotterdam’s future, made them inspired and motivated to be part of the city. For instance, James mentioned that the brand messages felt somewhat like a call to action to its citizens:

I think it's cool, it feels more targeted towards citizens. It is not like a tourism ad or like it connects with them to visit, even though it has certain spots. But it's more, it conveys the main mission of building something together, and that the city is just like a collective work of multiple people, and everything that every individual does can be summed up together to what the city does (James - R11).

This shows the brand’s emphasis on residents taking individual and collective initiative in shaping the city.

In contrast with these sentiments, other respondents had a more negative view, because they felt the brand was misleading and unrealistic, due to it lacking representation and only showing certain parts of the city. In particular, Stefan felt that it was a missed opportunity that the brand did not equally highlight the city’s hardships. This sentiment reoccurred in multiple interviews with the residents, as others described the campaign to be surface-level and a false positive view. Some respondents also found the brand's statements to

be contradictory to its actions. They expressed that the city promotes 'Rotterdam. Make it Happen', but does not take sufficient steps to involve and engage its residents, in particular the municipality. As Bea expressed: "There are many people who can bring new ideas and new perspectives to the city, but nothing is done with them.". This suggests that though some respondents feel encouraged and inspired by the meanings and message the brand evokes, others feel frustrated due to the brand narrative and presentation not fully aligning with their reality and perceptions of the city. Overall, these findings reflect a mix of positive and negative brand images, shaped by the respondents' personal experience, ideologies, norms and values.

4.4 Residents' Place Brand Identification

To assess whether place brand perception has an influence on respondents' propensity for civic engagement, this study first analysed how perception can lead to potential attitudes and behaviours through brand identification. This part will address residents' brand identification through their identity fit, attractiveness of identification and optimal distinctness.

4.4.1 Identity fit

As mentioned in Chapter 4, identity fit is the extent to which a person considers their identity and personal values to be consistent with those of the brand. These respondents' personal values, perceived brand values and actual brand values were compared with each other. Respondents varied in the degree to which they experienced identity fit. Amy, Derick, Alex, Ingrid and James expressed a perceived similarity between their values and those of the brand. These respondents perceived proactivity, eagerness, courage, resilience and collaboration as important values of the brand, which align with their own ambition for self-improvement and helping others. This resonates strongly with the can-do mentality and lifestyle that RMIH promotes.

However, some respondents did not see a resemblance between their identity and RMIH's brand identity. Bea, Stefan and Chris stressed the importance of equality and inclusivity when asked about their personal values. However, when asked about the RMIH values, they expressed that although RMIH promotes similar values in its statements, it does not reflect them in its image. As one respondent explained:

I just think that a lot of people in Rotterdam actually have less to spend and don't get much opportunity to make things happen. Yes. It [RMIH] looks nice, but people don't have the money for it, and they mainly show the attractive side of Rotterdam". (Stefan - R9)

This shows that the image and identity RMIH is promoting may differ for individuals who face challenges in the city, particularly those with lower disposable income. Lastly, the remaining respondents found the brand vague, and due to that, they experienced limited identity fit.

4.4.2 Attractiveness of identification

As for the attractiveness of identification, six out of the eleven respondents expressed pride in the city's urban identity and ongoing transformation, which is reflected through the brand. Some respondents mentioned that they find the portrayal of the city as resilient and working-class attractive, as they found it to align well with Rotterdam's history and personality. As Alex expressed: "Rotterdam remains a working-class city, and I think they are trying to reflect that image in the brand, so I consider that a positive aspect.". Furthermore, respondents felt that the city, in particular, has a good national and international reputation due to its urban development and modern architecture and found that the brand campaign highlighted those aspects well.

To get a better understanding of the respondent's degree of attraction, they were asked to name some negative traits of the city and if those traits influence how they view the city or the brand. Respondents reported the city's large size, chaotic atmosphere, urban decline and safety concerns as the negative traits of the city. Six respondents expressed that the negative traits did not have an influence on how they viewed the city, due to their positive experiences with the city and their abilities. However, in terms of how they viewed the brand, the negative traits did have an influence on the brand's perceived authenticity and legitimacy. As one respondent explained, the manner in which the brand portrays itself feels opportunistic and as a false positive.

4.4.3 Optimal distinctness

Lastly, optimal distinctness assesses the perceived openness and inclusivity of the brand. A majority of respondents saw RMIH as relatively inclusive due to the ethnic diversity and different sexual orientations portrayed in its brand material. However, outside the

aspects, a significant part of the respondents felt that the brand overlooked certain professions, age groups and neighbourhoods. Respondents expressed that the brand portrays the typical resident as a middle-aged individual who works in either the creative, port or financial industry, who is doing relatively well financially and is situated in the city centre. Therefore, respondents who fell outside this portrayal expressed difficulty with identifying with the brand, as they could not see themselves in the promoted brand materials. It was noticeable that younger respondents found it harder to relate to the brand campaign, as it focused mainly on working individuals and less on students, such as Amy and Alex, who were still in school.

4.5 Residents' Propensity for Civic Engagement

To assess resident propensity for civic engagement, this research focused on respondents' attitudes towards civic engagement, their civic commitment, social norms, and their civic capacity and behavioural control.

4.5.1 Attitudes

Respondents reported four types of civic motivation for engaging in civic activities, namely, for a sense of contribution, self-improvement, city/community improvement and amusement. Nine out of eleven respondents expressed that, as citizens, they feel a sense of duty to contribute positively towards the city. As Elisabeth explained: "I feel called to do so in that sense. I am also a resident of the city. I am also part of the whole. In that sense, there are a few things I could do". Furthermore, some respondents perceived it as directly beneficial as amusement, a source for gaining new experiences, skills or amusement, whilst others perceived it as indirectly beneficial, as it can lead to improvement in their own environment/community.

Though nine out of the eleven respondents mostly reported positive attitudes towards civic engagement, they reported certain conditions for civic propensity. They expressed feeling more inclined to engage if the civic activity takes place in their community and aligns with their norms and values. Furthermore, the type of civic activity also seemed to influence their propensity, as some were more inclined to engage in fundraisers and others in protests. Moreover, a few respondents reported feeling less inclined to engage civically. This was due to multiple reasons, such as a lack of trust in civic change, disillusionment with the city, feeling unheard of or feeling like an outsider. For instance, Sam expressed: "To me, it feels kind of like a lost cause already, because over the years I didn't see any improvement."

4.5.2 Civic commitment and social norms

As mentioned, many respondents reported feeling a sense of duty towards the city. Notably, the majority of them expressed experiencing a lack of social pressures from their peers or family to engage in civic actions, but instead feeling intrinsically motivated due to their empathy for others and to fulfil their sense of contribution to their own community and environment. Particularly, Rebecca demonstrated this sentiment:

“I am a resident of this city. I grew up here. I have my own business. I always think that if you have a business somewhere, you should try to see what the neighbourhood needs and what you can do to help.”

In contrast, some respondents expressed a limited sense of responsibility due to plans to move elsewhere, shifting responsibility to others, or simply having an individualistic mindset. For example, one respondent stated that they consider civic engagement important, but tend to make less effort when they see that others are not making an effort either. Besides that, another respondent reported: “Because I've kind of distanced myself so far from the city, also for the same reasons that I mentioned previously that I don't really feel involved in general, unless it's kind of beneficial for me” (Sam - R2).

4.5.3 Civic capacity and behavioural control

Lastly, respondents reported their perception of their civic abilities and the structural hurdles to civic engagement. Eight out of eleven respondents believed they had a sufficient level of skills and knowledge to participate in civic engagement. However, younger respondents reported having limited experience and expressed a lack of confidence in their skills due to unfamiliarity with civic processes and limited prior involvement. Older respondents reported more confidence in their civic ability, due to prior experience with community initiatives or activism, but also having a broader social network.

Respondents reported having difficulty truly engaging in civic activities due to structural hurdles, such as a lack of awareness and information access, engagement opportunities, language barriers, time and money. As one respondent reported: “For me, it's if I can, I would. But if it requires a lot of energy from my side that I just don't want to invest, then I wouldn't really have the initiative or motivation to do so.”. Moreover, respondents reported feeling a lack of institutional support from RMIH and the municipality. In particular,

Rebecca, Bea, Elisabeth, Stefan and Chris expressed that there is a lack of involvement of residents and grassroots initiatives, even though the brand states to encourage and uplift new initiatives and involvement.

4.6 The Relation Between Residents' Brand Perception, Brand Identification and Propensity for Civic Engagement.

Through analysing the abovementioned findings further, certain patterns started to emerge from the data. Firstly, a pattern between respondents' brand perception and brand identification was observed. Four respondents who had a positive brand perception also had a stronger identification with the RMIH brand than respondents with a neutral or negative perception. These respondents reported seeing the brand as a call to action, which aligned with the findings from the content analysis, in particular RMIH's emphasis on highlighting ambitions and forward-thinking mindsets. This corresponded with respondents' identity fit, as they reported recognising themselves in the brand's values, particularly resilience and eagerness. In terms of the attractiveness of identification, they expressed pride in the city's ongoing transformation. Furthermore, in terms of optimal distinctness, they reported viewing the brand as relatively diverse. Altogether, these four respondents demonstrated a strong brand identification.

Notably, four respondents had negative perceptions and one had a neutral perception, which corresponded with weaker identifications. Their reported brand image did not align with the brand identity, as they felt the brand to be overly focused on the city centre and positive aspects of the city. In terms of identity fit, they expressed that the brand did not represent the experience of all residents equally; they did not see an appeal in the brand and viewed it as exclusionary and unrealistic, which demonstrates a weak identification. Thus, the data shows a relatively positive correlation between brand perception and brand identification, apart from respondents Amy and Elisabeth, who had positive brand perceptions and moderate brand identifications.

The data for brand identification and propensity for civic engagement showed mixed patterns. From the four respondents who had positive brand perceptions and strong brand identifications, only two respondents, Alex and Ingrid, demonstrated a strong propensity for civic engagement. As Ingrid expressed: "Yes, because you are part of the city where you live. And by participating in activities, you maintain your networks, inviting people from other places, and then you are part of the city". This comment expresses a sense of belonging, commitment and attachment to the city as a result of engaging with brand activities.

Furthermore, these respondents expressed a stronger sense of responsibility towards the city, were more confident in their civic abilities and demonstrated a stronger sense of behavioural control compared to the other two respondents with positive brand perception and strong brand identifications.

These respondents reported relatively positive attitudes towards civic engagement, but low civic capacity and perceived behavioural control. They reported structural barriers such as institutional support, time and money to be of significant influence. This was also the case for most of the other respondents, such as Amy and Elisabeth, who had moderate levels of brand identification and Stefan, who had a weak brand identification. These findings demonstrate a difference between willingness and propensity, as with propensity, an individual's perceived civic ability does play a role.

Furthermore, from the respondents with negative brand perception and weak brand identifications, two demonstrated a weak propensity for civic engagement, namely Sam and Bea. For Sam, this was due to disillusionment with the city and a lack of trust in civic change; for Bea, this was also due to a lack of trust and institutional support. Notable findings were those of Chris and Bea, who had neutral to negative brand perceptions and moderate to weak brand identification, but still had a strong propensity for civic engagement, stronger than respondents who reported a positive brand perception and identification. These respondents demonstrated both positive civic attitudes, civic commitment and civic capacity, possibly due to their previous experience with civic engagement. These patterns show different outcomes and thus demonstrate that perception and identification do not directly correspond with a propensity for civic engagement, but that factors such as structural barriers and confidence in one's civic abilities are also of importance.

4.7 Discussion

This section critically reflects on the meaning and relevance of the results mentioned above. The findings revealed various perceptions from residents. Some viewed the brand positively as inspirational and a call to action, whilst others who were more critical of the brand viewed it as unrealistic, exclusionary and vague. These views stemmed from a mismatch between residents' lived experiences and the brand's promoted identity. The findings emphasise the importance of a brand's inclusivity, authenticity and appeal to diverse resident groups. As targeting or appealing to a narrow group undermines the potential for identification and brand ability to facilitate engagement. According to the literature, such a misalignment can make it difficult for individuals to identify with the brand (Ripoll et al.,

2025; Yu & Kim, 2020). This data supports this as those who viewed the brand critically demonstrated weaker brand identifications, whilst those with positive perceptions reported either stronger brand identifications. Namely, higher identity fit, attractiveness of identification and optimal distinctness, which corresponds with Zenker et al. (2017) 's theory.

However, this connection did not directly influence residents' propensity for civic engagement. This nuances the theoretical assumptions made by Zenker and Petersen (2014), Sadeque et al. (2022) and Taecharungroj (2016), who claimed that place brand perception and identification can result in prosocial behaviours, such as civic engagement. As there were only a few residents who demonstrated a consistent pattern between their perceptions, identification and propensity as illustrated in the conceptual framework, the majority did not. This supports the critique of Ripoll et al. (2025) about the overestimated impact of place branding on individuals' behaviour. While brand perception and brand identification can positively contribute to propensity, they do so insufficiently. With other factors, such as structural barriers to engagement and personal attitudes, notably more present in the data and possibly playing a decisive role in shaping residents' propensity for civic engagement. This is in line with the Theory of Planned Behaviour that highlights the impact of perceived behavioural control, social norms and attitudes on propensity (Kerby, 2024; Pavlova et al., 2022). In particular, behavioural control and civic capacity help explain why the positive identification of residents had a limited impact on civic engagement due to perceived barriers.

5. Conclusion

The Rotterdam place brand has undergone several changes and has, in recent years, attempted to focus more on the citizenship and civic pride of its residents (Belabas, 2023). This study focused on residents' perceptions of Rotterdam's current place brand (RMIH) and whether that leads to brand identification and subsequently has an effect on the propensity for engagement.

Firstly, there are several theoretical concepts underlying place brand perception and propensity for civic engagement. Place brand perception is how an individual views a city's brand, based on its brand image and brand identity. According to Braun et al. (2013), positive perceptions emerge when the brand identity aligns with the brand image as experienced by residents. Furthermore, propensity for civic engagement is defined in the literature as the likelihood that an individual will engage in civic actions, shaped by their civic commitment,

capacity, perceived behavioural control, attitudes and social norms (Kerby, 2024; Kim et al., 2024; Pavlova et al., 2022). According to Zenker and Petersen (2014), brand identification can function as a mediating variable that bridges their perception and propensity, when individuals perceive alignment with the brand, find it attractive, and feel free to selectively identify with its traits.

The key findings of this study demonstrate a noticeable alignment between positive place brand perception and strong place brand identification; however, this connection did not directly influence residents' propensity for civic engagement. A majority expressed positive attitudes and a sense of civic duty; however, this did not always translate into a strong likelihood of engaging in civic actions, due to barriers such as time, money, institutional support or disillusionment. Notably, respondents with negative brand perceptions and weak brand identifications demonstrated more civic commitment and capacity compared to those with positive brand perceptions and strong identifications.

This suggests that other factors also play a significant role in shaping their propensity. There were only a few residents who demonstrated a consistent pattern between their perceptions, identification and propensity as illustrated in the conceptual framework; however, the majority did not. This suggests that while perception and identification can positively contribute to propensity, they do so insufficiently. With other factors, such as structural barriers to engagement and personal attitudes, notably more present in the data and possibly playing a decisive role in shaping residents' propensity for civic engagement.

All in all, to answer the research questions, *'How do residents' perceptions of the 'Rotterdam. Make it happen' place brand influence their propensity for civic engagement, through their brand identification?'*. This study concludes that no causal relationship can be confirmed from these findings; however, it points to a more complex and dynamic relationship between the variables of brand perception, where multiple factors can play a role, such as personal experiences, values, individual capacities, and structural barriers such as institutional support, time and money. This implies that while a resident's brand perception can have an effect on their propensity for civic engagement, it does not solely determine it.

5.1 Limitations

Reflecting back on the research design, the chosen methods for this study allowed a rich and nuanced data collection, in particular, the semi-structured interviews and sampling method. Furthermore, the content analysis allowed a deeper understanding of RMIH's brand identity. However, the limitations of this study should also be acknowledged. Firstly, the

generalizability of this limited study is limited due to the small sample size and context-specific nature, as the study focused on a single case, the RMIH place brand. Moreover, findings were also affected by RMIH visibility and recognition, which was notably limited for some respondents. A more well-known place brand could have possibly yielded different patterns of identification and propensity. Furthermore, social desirability may have influenced the respondents' initial answers regarding their propensity for social engagement, but by probing further, they became more candid about their doubts and barriers to social engagement.

Future studies should take the key results and limitations into account. For instance, doing a comparative case study with a bigger sample size could further explore contextual factors and provide insight into the impact of different place brands on residents' propensity for civic engagement. Moreover, to see what type of brand elements are more appealing to residents and if brand visibility has a significant impact on brand perception. Besides that, a quantitative study could also be useful to measure the causal relationship between brand perception, identification and propensity for civic engagement.

5.2 Recommendations

The findings of this study highlight RMIH's difficulty with promoting civic engagement among the residents. Despite the small number of respondents, it can be concluded that RMIH is not perceived as legitimate or visible by the entire city, as the focus is still too concentrated on the city centre. To strengthen the effectiveness of the brand and improve its brand image and identity, the following recommendations are being proposed :

Firstly, incorporate honest and complex narratives into the brand identity. Rather than highlighting mostly aspirational imagery and positive place narratives, RMIH should reflect the city's diverse socio-economic context and the challenges the city and its residents face. RMIH promoting how the city faces challenges and how they are actively being addressed could foster a more legitimate and inclusive 'can-do' narrative. This will highlight the brand attributes that residents found attractive, whilst also promoting a more realistic brand identity.

Furthermore, improve inclusivity by reflecting Rotterdam's population and promoting diverse brand narratives. The brand campaign should strive for more inclusivity, not only by reflecting Rotterdam's demographics and neighbourhoods. But also being more open to diverse narratives, by sharing local experiences and including more dialogues from underrepresented neighbourhoods and communities. For instance, RMIH could involve citizens in co-creating these brand narratives. Furthermore, improving RMIH inclusivity and

visibility also involves creating more inclusive imagery and broader distribution of branding materials throughout the city.

Lastly, explicitly make civic engagement apart from RMIH's identity and image. The brand should make civic engagement a bigger part of its brand narrative by promoting civic activities and community initiatives on its platforms, providing information and support for residents on how to get involved and partnering with community-led organisations. This makes civic engagement explicitly part of RMIH, which could help lower residents' perceived barriers to civic engagement and mobilise them more effectively.

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Appendix A: Interview topic list

Introduction

- Introduce yourself
- Introduce the subject
- Explain the purpose of the interview
- Duration 30 min
- Ask the respondent for their informed consent
 - o Mention that the interview is anonymous and voluntary, and that the interviewee is allowed to ask a question or stop the interview at any time.

Background questions

- Age
- Education
- Rotterdam north/ south/ west/ east
 - How long have you lived there?

Brand image

1. Could you describe Rotterdam in a few words?
 - a. What type of visuals or symbols do you relate to Rotterdam?
 2. Are you aware of the “Rotterdam. Make It Happen” campaign?
 - a. Where have you seen it? What do you think of it? What does it mean to you?
 3. What kind of activities or events in Rotterdam do you associate with this slogan?
 - a. Have you ever participated in these activities or events? Are these events meaningful to you?
- Attributes of the Rotterdam
 - Activities within Rotterdam
 - Meanings the place (brand) evokes

Identity fit

4. What are your values, and what values do you believe are fitting for Rotterdam and “Rotterdam. Make It Happen”?
5. (Show promotional video) Do you feel represented by this campaign?
 - a. Why yes, why not?

- Perceived similarity values and traits.
- Feeling part of the target audience

Attractiveness of identification

6. Does it give you a positive view of Rotterdam?
 - a. Why/ why not?
 7. What kind of reputation do you think Rotterdam has as a city?
 - a. Do you think this reputation affects how you are viewed as a Rotterdammer?
Do you think the “Rotterdam. Make It Happen” campaign could affect this campaign? How/ why not?
 8. Do you view any part of the city or the campaign as less favourable (negative)?
 - a. What parts? How does this affect your overall view of the city and the campaign?
- Positive city image
 - Perceived reputation
 - Compartmentalisation of negative characteristics
 - Perceived complexity

Optimal distinctness

9. Are there certain aspects of Rotterdam, and its promoted place brand, that you identify more with than others?
 - a. Why?
 10. To what extent do you view the “Rotterdam. Make It Happen” campaign as open or inclusive?
 - a. Can you further explain your answer?
- Perceived openness of brand identity.
 - Perceived identification flexibility.

Theory of Planned Behaviour

11. Have you ever thought about participating in activities to help/support the city?
 - a. Why/why not? What do you think are the positive or negative outcomes of doing so?

12. Do you experience any social pressure to engage in civic actions, such as voting, volunteering, protesting, participating in community initiatives, donating or socially conscious purchasing?

a. Do you feel encouraged to do so?

13. Do you feel like you can make a difference in your city?

a. Why/why not?

- attitude (expected consequences)
- social norms (social pressure, approval, expectation, peers and family)
- perceived behavioural control (ability and rewards)

Civic Commitment

14. To what extent do you feel a sense of responsibility to contribute positively to your city?

a. How come you feel this way?

- Sense of responsibility

Civic Capacity

15. Are you aware of the social issues in the city ?

a. To what extent do you try to stay informed?

16. Do you feel like you have the knowledge or skills to contribute to your city meaningfully?

a. Why not? Do you feel encouraged to do so?

17. Do you feel empowered to engage and take action as a citizen when the city is in need?

a. Why/why not? Can you give an example of when you felt that way?

- Awareness of social issues
- Perceived level of knowledge and skills
- Sense of empowerment

Closing=

- Thank the respondent for the interview
- answering any questions.

Appendix B: Selected ‘Make it happen’ documents and videos

Table 2. Selected *documents*

	Title	Author/Publisher	Type	Link	Length/ Word Count	Date
1.	Rotterdam. Make It Happen. Meerjarenstrategie 2020 - 2024	Rotterdam. Make It Happen	Strategic document	https://rotterdammakeithappen.nl/app/uploads/2020/09/Publicksversie-meerjarenstrategie-merkalliantie-2020-2024.pdf	24 pages	Aug 2020
2.	Rotterdam. Make It Happen. Meerjarenstrategie Merkalliantie 2025 - 2029.	Rotterdam Partners	Strategic document	https://rotterdampartners.maglr.com/new-meerjarenstrategie-merkalliantie-2025-2029/voorpagina	31 pages	25 Jan 2025
3.	Positionering en focus	Rotterdam. Make It Happen	Website page	https://rotterdammakeithappen.nl/gedachtegoed/positionering-focus/	194 words	15 Jan 2025
4.	Over rotterdam make it happen- gedachtegoed	Rotterdam. Make It Happen	Website page	https://rotterdammakeithappen.nl/gedachtegoed/	259 words	13 Mar 2023
5.	De merkalliantie	Rotterdam. Make It Happen	Website page	https://rotterdammakeithappen.nl/gedachtegoed/de-merkalliantie/	468 words	16 Jun 2025
6.	Merkbelofte & DNA	Rotterdam. Make It Happen	Website page	https://rotterdammakeithappen.nl/gedachtegoed/merkbelofte-dna/	384 words	13 Mar 2023
7.	Make it happen mentaliteit	Rotterdam. Make It Happen	Website page	https://rotterdammakeithappen.nl/gedachtegoed/make-it-happen-mentaliteit/	159 words	13 Mar 2023

8.	Tien jaar make it happen	Rotterdam. Make It Happen	Website page	https://rotterdammakeithappen.nl/showcases/tien-jaar-rotterdam-make-it-happen/	1797 words	2 Dec 2024
9.	Rotterdam de placemaking hoofstad van Europa	Rotterdam. Make It Happen	Website page	https://rotterdammakeithappen.nl/showcases/rotterdam-de-placemaking-hoofdstad-van-europa/	343 words	4 Jul 2025
10.	Hey studenten welkom in Rotterdam	Rotterdam. Make It Happen	Website page	https://rotterdammakeithappen.nl/showcases/studenten-campagne/	431 words	25 Sep 2024
11.	De ruimte ligt voor het oprapen	Rotterdam. Make It Happen	Website page	https://rotterdammakeithappen.nl/showcases/de-ruimte-ligt-voor-het-oprapen/	1244 words	19 May 2022
12.	Van voedsel bank tot wijkrestaurant	Rotterdam. Make It Happen	Website page	https://rotterdammakeithappen.nl/showcases/van-voedselbank-tot-wijkrestaurant/	944 words	1 Mar 2022
13.	Volunteers Make the Rotterdam Marathon the Most Beautiful	Rotterdam. Make It Happen	Website page	https://rotterdammakeithappen.nl/en/showcases/volunteers-make-the-rotterdam-marathon-the-most-beautiful/	893 words	19 Apr 2025

Table 3. Selected *videos*

	Title	Publisher	Type	Link	Duration	Date
1.	Brand movie Rotterdam. Make It Happen	Rotterdam. Make It Happen	Promotional video	https://youtu.be/ehiWMy8iN94	1:03 minutes	10 Jan 2023
2.	Together we make it Happen! Rotterdam. Make it Happen.	Rotterdam. Make It Happen	Promotional video	https://youtu.be/AK6oAF3LM7k?si=yt1sj9RSW8eHYgUh	3:29 minutes	11 Oct 2022
3.	Terugblik 10 jaar Rotterdam. Make it Happen.	Rotterdam. Make It Happen	Promotional video	https://youtu.be/znky8GGJGL0?si=olZiv_gN_siBPFBH	2:51 minutes	5 Dec 2024
4.	Rotterdam make it happen Jubileum estafette	Rotterdam. Make It Happen	Promotional video	https://youtu.be/8mnbORxPsRs	0:26 minutes	29 Nov 2024
5.	Rotterdam leert je leven!	Rotterdam. Make It Happen	Promotional video	https://youtu.be/Hxq5MEVSf6Q?si=fhyjzSjgMVx8OIJJB	0:25 minutes	13 Aug 2024
6.	Vrijwilligers tijdens de Rotterdam Marathon - Andre Hoogendijk	Rotterdam. Make It Happen	Promotional video	https://youtu.be/iEajVhAG1_E	1:07 minutes	19 Apr 2025
7.	Merkalliantie 5 Jaar	Rotterdam. Make It Happen	Promotional video	https://youtu.be/5dzOnDRto5A?si=ACEZBAoXKtG4xcYx	5:01 minutes	7 Jan 2020

Appendix C: List of respondents

Table 4. *List of respondents*

Respondents	Pseudonym	Age	Education	Neighbourhood	Years lived in the city
Respondent 1	Amy	22	WO	West	4
Respondent 2	Sam	24	MBO	West	1.5
Respondent 3	Derick	22	WO	West	5.5
Respondent 4	Rebecca	47	MBO	East	47
Respondent 5	Bea	31	MBO	East	13
Respondent 6	Alex	25	WO	East	4
Respondent 7	Ingrid	56	MBO	North	27
Respondent 8	Elisabeth	59	HBO	North	57,5
Respondent 9	Stefan	43	MBO	North	30
Respondent 10	Chris	24	HBO	South	5
Respondent 11	James	22	WO	South	< 1

Appendix D: Code tree

Table 5. *Code tree*

Theoretical concepts	Selective codes (D)	Axial code (D/I)	Open codes (I)
Brand Perception	Physical Attributes	Associated places	City centre (Beurs, blaak, Coolsingel, Museumpark) and Kop van Zuid.
		City Icons	Euromast, Markthal, Erasmus bridge, Cubic Houses, Ahoy, Depot, The Port, Popular Statues and Feijenoord.
	Activities	Types	Arts and culture events (Summer Carnival, Museum Night), festivals (Rotterdam Film Festival), sports events (Marathon).
		Experiences	Have attended positive experiences, not of value, internationally focused.
	Meanings	Emotional response	Disappointment, frustration, hope, indifference inspiration, pride and belonging.
		Opinions	Sense of familiarity and alignment; creates a positive image, vague, misleading, unrealistic, and not well known.
Brand Identity*	Objectives	Agency and participation	Call to action, lack of citizen engagement or involvement, effort and aspiration oriented, promotes collaboration and connection.
		short term	Fostering connection and collaboration, taking initiative, fostering innovation, increasing credibility, community projects, attracting frontrunners.
	Values and Personality	Long term	Reputation building, future-proof, growth and development, self-sustaining city, world stage.
		Culture and History	Always in transition, can-do mentality, worldly, diverse, creative, craftsmanship, vibrant, no-nonsense, proactive, and resilient.
	Benefits and Uniqueness	Lifestyle	Circular, healthy, smart and lively (brand themes); boundary crossing, pioneering, entrepreneurial, sustainable, and collaborative.
		Attributes	Bold, raw, unfinished, direct, resilient, idiosyncratic, pioneers, ambitious, experimental, Forward-thinking, entrepreneurial, culture.
Place Brand Identification		Rewards	Improvement for the city, visibility, knowledge and expertise, fostering opportunities and solutions, events, and societal impact.
		Personal values	Individualism, helping others, inclusivity and equality, self-improvement, anti-discrimination and tolerance.

	Identity fit ¹	Perceived brand values	Innovative and future-oriented, diversity, eagerness, proactivity, resilience, transformational, sustainability and livability, collaborative, economic identity.
	Attractiveness identification	Urban identity and transformation	architecture and urban development, modern and futuristic, ongoing transformation, vibrant, world example, resilient, working-class city
		Contrast and inequality	Big, hectic, perceived urban decline, and safety concerns.
	Optimal distinctness ¹	Perceived inclusivity	Diversity/multicultural, representation based on sexuality, creatives.
		Perceived exclusivity	Profession (sector), overlooks vulnerable groups, neglected neighbourhoods, a lack of showing social side, and certain generations.
Propensity for civic engagement	Attitudes	Civic motivations	Sense of contribution, self-improvement, city/community improvement, amusement.
		Personal hurdles	Feeling unheard, feeling like an outsider, disillusionment with the city, trust in civic change, and limited time in the city.
		Conditions for engagement	Alignment with norms and values, takes place in the own community, the type of civic activity.
	Civic commitment and social norms	Sense of responsibility	Lack of social pressures, empathy for others, sense of contribution, individualism, mostly in one's own community.
	Civic capacity and behavioural control	Believe in one's civic ability	Experience with civic activities, knowledge, skills, and social network.
		Structural hurdles	Awareness and information access, access to engagement opportunities, language, money, time, and institutional support.

* D: Deductive coding

D/I: A mixture of deductive and inductive coding

I: Inductive coding

¹ The sub-dimension of Identity Fit 'Perceived target group' from the operationalisation has been merged into the axial codes of Optimal distinctness, as most of their open codes overlapped.

Appendix E: Informed consent

Information sheet for thesis research: Do we want to 'Make it Happen?' - ENG

Under the supervision of Alberto Gianoli, Naomi van Elshuis is examining residents' perception of Rotterdam's place brand and its impact on their willingness to engage in the city. This research can be realised with the help of your participation. Naomi is curious about your opinion on Rotterdam's place brand 'Rotterdam. Make It Happen'. There are no right or wrong answers.

Why this research?

The goal of this research is to gain insights into how residents view Rotterdam's place brand and to research the potential relationship between place branding and civic engagement. This research is being conducted from the Erasmus University Rotterdam.

Process

You will participate in a study in which we will gather information through:

- Interviewing you and recording your answers via audio or video recording. A transcript of the interview will be produced

Confidentiality

We will do everything we can to protect your privacy as well as possible. In addition to the student, only the thesis supervisor and second reader of the student will have access to all information you provide.

No confidential information or personal data from or about you will be released so that someone will be able to identify you.

In the research you are referred to by a made-up name (pseudonym), unless you have given permission to use your name for quotes.

Voluntary participation

You do not have to answer any questions that you do not want to answer. If you do not want to say something in a group, but would like to in private, you can e-mail or call [student name] afterwards. Your participation is voluntary and you can stop whenever you want.

If, during the research, you decide to terminate your participation, the information that you have already provided will be used until the moment that consent is withdrawn.

Do you want to stop participating in this research? Then contact Naomi van Elshuis via 598033ne@eur.nl or +31684296957.

Data storage

Anonymous data or pseudonyms will be used in the thesis. The audio recordings, forms and/or other documents that are created or collected in the context of this thesis will be stored securely.

The research data is stored for a period of ten years. Data will be deleted or made anonymous so that they can no longer be traced to a person at the end of this period, at the latest.

Submitting a question or complaint

If you have specific questions about how your personal data is handled, you can direct your question to Naomi van Elshuis via 598033ne@eur.nl or +31684296957. You can also submit a complaint to the Dutch Data Protection Authority if you suspect that your data has been processed incorrectly.

By signing this consent form I acknowledge the following:

- | | Yes | No |
|---|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| 1 I am sufficiently informed about the research. I have read the information sheet and have had the opportunity to ask questions. These questions have been answered sufficiently and I have had sufficient time to decide on my participation. | ☐ | ☐ |

- 2 I volunteer to participate in this study. It is clear to me that I can terminate participation in the study at any time, without providing a reason. I don't have to answer a question if I do not want to. ☐ ☐

In order to participate in the study, it is also necessary that you give specific permission for various elements. Note that if you are younger than eighteen, a parent/guardian must also sign this form.

- 3 I give permission to process the data collected about me during this research, as explained in the attached information sheet ☐ ☐

- 4 I give permission for audio and/or video recordings to be made during discussions and a transcript of my answers to be produced. ☐ ☐

- 5 I give permission for use my answers as quotes in the student's thesis. ☐ ☐

- 6 I give permission to store the data collected from me and to use it in a pseudonymized form for all further research where it can be used at a later date. ☐ ☐

Name participant:

Name student: Naomi van Elshuis

Signature:

Signature:

Date:

Date:

